



Combating Human Trafficking: Working Collaboratively to Stop Exploitation, Assist Victims

The Attorney General's Office continued to work collaboratively with law enforcement and other agencies in 2005 to prevent human trafficking, and to provide assistance to trafficking victims.

Human trafficking — typically involving illegal immigrants who are sold into domestic servitude, exploited as cheap labor or forced into prostitution — is a growing concern in New Jersey and across the nation.

The Problem

Experts believe that between 15,000 and 20,000 immigrants are smuggled into the country each year — an estimated 4,000 of them into New Jersey. Typically brought here from Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, the illegal immigrants are often forced into domestic slavery, “sweat-shop” factory labor and migrant farm work, or are exploited in sex-for-sale enterprises.

Often, human traffickers take advantage of those who are poor and unemployed — or underemployed — and who have no access to social safety nets.

Victims are enticed with bogus offers of good-paying work and “better lives,” then forced to toil for substandard wages under inhumane conditions. Typically, they are threatened with deportation, violence or death if they should report the treatment to which they are being subjected.

Early Prosecution

As a result of a cooperative state-federal investigation spearheaded largely by the Division of Criminal Justice, three people were successfully prosecuted for inducing Russian women to enter the United States illegally, and compelling them to dance nude in strip clubs in Manville, South Amboy and Lakewood.

The defendants represented to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in 2002 that the women were coming to the United States to tour with an internationally recognized or culturally unique Russian show group.

Instead, they threatened the women with serious injury or Russian-mob retaliation if they did not engage in nude dancing or pay the defendants \$200 a day from their earnings as nude dancers. The women were typically forced to work at the nude dancing establishments six days a week, eight to 10 hours a day, with only one additional day off a month.

The defendants — including a U.S. citizen of Russian descent and a Russian national in the U.S. on an expired visa — pleaded guilty in 2004

to human-trafficking-related federal charges, and were later sentenced to federal prison terms.

NJ Anti-Trafficking Initiative

In recognition of the growing human trafficking problem, the Attorney General's Office continued in 2005 to collaborate with a variety of law enforcement, social service and other agencies through its support of the New Jersey Anti-Trafficking Initiative. As the name implies, the New Jersey Anti-Trafficking Initiative was developed to discourage human trafficking, and to assist the victims of trafficking by connecting them with resources and services that can help them avoid further exploitation. The latter mission is vital, because many who are victimized lack financial and other resources, have no knowledge of how to access agencies that can help, and are fearful of reaching out in the first place.

The Anti-Trafficking Initiative is a collaborative effort involving the International Institute of New Jersey, state and federal law enforcement agencies, government human services agencies, the Monmouth University School of Social Work, Safe Horizon, a New-York-based violence prevention organization that also assists the victims of crime and abuse, and the Archdiocese of Newark.

The Initiative was established in 2004 following a statewide conference in which stakeholders from throughout New Jersey gathered to share information and perspectives on the human trafficking problem, discuss gaps in available services for trafficking victims, and generate recommendations for filling those gaps.

The Initiative aims to develop a coordinated statewide system for identifying trafficking victims and getting them the help they need. This includes increasing awareness and understanding of the scope of human trafficking in New Jersey; identifying and strengthening areas where coordination and services are lacking; and establishing a network of law enforcement officers, service providers and other first responders to help trafficking victims in the state. The Initiative held its first Advisory Committee meeting on August 26, 2003. Participants included social and legal service providers; law enforcement officials; and state and federal government officials. Initial discussions focused on increasing trust between trafficking victims and law enforcement, and the need for emergency shelter for pre-certified trafficking victims.

In 2005, the Initiative played a key role in assisting approximately 20 women and girls from Honduras who had been enticed to illegally emigrate to Union City with the promise of waitress jobs. In fact, the women ended up being confronted with massive debt — smugglers were alleged to have demanded fees of \$20,000 per woman — allegedly sexually assaulted, and forced to sell themselves for sex. The women were arrested in January 2005. However, largely through the efforts of the Anti-Trafficking Initiative, they were provided safe shelter, food and other assistance pending attempts to obtain services — available under the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 — that would enable them to find housing and, possibly, live and work legally in the United States.

‘Slavery’ called a growing fear for immigrants

Thousands being exploited,
activist tells Paramus panel

By MIGUEL PEREZ
STAFF WRITER

PARAMUS — Victims of hu-

He said victims are much more likely to open up to civilians who speak their own language than to law officers.